646 The Legislature consisted in each case, largely for reasons of economy, of a single chamber, elected for a three-year term on a very wide franchise;[1] extraordinary sessions might be convened at the request of a specified proportion of its members, of the Government (in Estonia and Latvia), or of the President (in Latvia and Lithuania).

643 In Estonia the Head of the State was the Prime Minister of the day—here again, apparently, from motives of economy; thus every change of government involved a change of President. In Latvia and Lithuania the President was elected for a three-year term[2] by the Legislature, which could recall him by a two-thirds vote, and also institute criminal proceedings against him. In Lithuania he could dissolve the *Seimas*, but in that case his own continuance in office depended on re-election by the next *Seimas*; similarly, the Latvian President could submit a proposal for the dissolution of the *Saeima* to a referendum, but if it was rejected he must himself resign. In both countries the President had the right to initiate legislation, or to return laws adopted by the Legislature (with the exception, in Lithuania, of those declared urgent by a two-thirds majority) for reconsideration; this veto could be overridden, however, by an ordinary majority in Latvia, and by a majority of the total number of deputies in Lithuania.

645 The Cabinet was responsible individually and collectively to the Legislature, and dependent on its vote of confidence; but, while in Latvia and Lithuania the Prime Minister was appointed by the President (himself selecting the other Ministers), and in Lithuania could be dismissed by him, in Estonia (where there was no President) the *Riigikogu* was supposed to elect each Minister individually.[3] All acts of the President, who was not politically responsible, had to be countersigned by a Minister; in Latvia, the appointment of the Prime Minister and proposals to dissolve the *Saeima* were exceptions to this rule.

642 By these provisions it was hoped to establish an elaborate counterpoise between the Legislative and Executive functions. Equally complicated measures were taken to preserve the control of the electorate over both. Apart from the usual 'bill of rights', these consisted chiefly of the popular initiative and the referendum.

[1] Citizens of both sexes who had reached the age of 20 in Estonia, and 21 in Latvia and Lithuania, were eligible to vote on a basis of direct, equal, universal, and secret suffrage, and of proportional representation. The number of deputies was fixed at 100 in the Estonian *Riigikogu* and the Latvian *Saeima*, and at 78 in the Lithuanian *Seimas*.

[2] The same person could not be elected for more than two consecutive terms.

[3] In practice, however, the function of President came to be exercised, during Cabinet crises, by the Speaker, who invited some one to form a government; after inter-party agreement, the new Prime Minister produced a list of Ministers which was accepted as a whole by the *Riigikogu*.

[1. in Constitutions after W.W.I -- 42 Analyst]

1: Anonymous U-4 (no date) 1938 RB1 Baltic States RB1
Estonia

land before the agrarian reforms; its programme included the defence of private property and enterprise, the creation of small properties from State reserves to satisfy the needs of the landless classes, and the subsidization and protection of agriculture by the State. Its leaders included M. Konstantin Paets, now President of the State and Dictator, Generals Laidoner and Soots, and MM. Teemant and Eenpalu (formerly Einbund). The Agrarians took part in all but three of the twenty coalition Governments between 1919 and 1934,[1] while the New Farmers, after their first appearance in 1926 in M. Teemant's Government, were only once excluded from office.

The two major groups of the Centre were the Labour and Populist parties. The Labour party was formed as the result of an amalgamation of two moderately radical parties which had appeared in the National Council of 1918,—the Radical Socialists led by MM. Wilms and Strandman, and the Social Travaillists led by MM. Piip and Seljamaa. It represented the liberal but non-socialist intelligentsia

[1] M. Paets was five times President of the Council (in 1921, 1923, 1931, 1932, and 1933); M. Teemant four times (1925, 1926, 1927, and 1932), and M. Eenpalu once (1932).

TABLE 8. *Estonian Election Results, 1919–34.*

| *Parties* | *First Constituent Assembly* | *State Assemblies* | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *1919–20* | *1920–3* | *1923–6* | *1926–9* | *1929–32* | *1933–4* |
| *Right:* | | | | | | |
| Agrarian | 8 | 21 | 23 | 23 | 24 | United Agrarian Party 42 |
| Settlers (New Farmers) | .. | .. | 4 | 14 | 14 | |
| *Centre:* | | | | | | |
| House owners | .. | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | National Middle Party 23 |
| Christian-Democrats | 4 | 7 | 8 | 5 | 4 | |
| Populists (Estonian Nationalists) | 25 | 10 | 8 | 8 | 9 | |
| Labour | 30 | 22 | 12 | 13 | 10 | |
| National Liberals | .. | .. | 4 | .. | .. | .. |
| Ex-service men | .. | .. | 1 | .. | .. | .. |
| Small landholders | .. | .. | 1 | .. | .. | .. |
| *Minorities:* | | | | | | |
| Russian | 1 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| German | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Swedish | 1 | .. | .. | .. | 1 | |
| *Left:* | | | | | | |
| Socialists (Social-Democrats) | 41 | 18 | 15 | 24 | 25 | 22 |
| Independent Socialists (Socialist Revolutionaries) | 7 | 11 | 5 | .. | .. | .. |
| Communists | .. | 5 | 10 | .. | .. | .. |
| Workers | .. | .. | .. | 6 | 6 | 5 |

It represented the liberal but non-socialist intelligentsia 665 [625]
and working classes, the artisans and commercial and government employees, and stood for a radical programme of social and agrarian reform. Its most valuable function was to hold the balance between the Agrarians and Social-Democrats, and during the whole course of the constitutional period it was only excluded from the Government on four occasions.[1] The **Populist party**, earlier known as the National Democratic Party, stood rather more to the Right, representing the bourgeois intellectuals and professional and business interests, and had its origin in the nationalist cultural movement under the Tsarist régime, and later, in the fusion of the Estonian Democrats and Radical Democrats in the National Council of 1918. It was represented in all but three Governments.[2]

The **Christian-Democrats**, or Christian-Nationalists, formed a smaller group whose chief concern was the defence of religious (Lutheran) and clerical interests. In social matters they followed the Right group at first, but gradually inclined towards the Centre. They participated in the majority of Cabinets after 1921, and their leader, Dr. Akel, was President of the Council in 1924, and Foreign Minister for a time under the dictatorship. Largely on account of the system of proportional representation, the Centre groups went through a phase of disintegration, especially between 1923 and 1926; the elections of 1932, however, saw a rally towards concentration, with the amalgamation of the Populists, the Labour party, Christian-Democrats, and House Owners into a single National Middle Party.

The only important group on the Left was the **Social-Democratic party**, led by MM. Rei and Martna, which was affiliated with the Second International, represented the interests of the working classes and trade unions, and stood for a moderate programme of State socialization of industry. In spite of their parliamentary strength, the Social-Democrats only took part in six Governments between 1919 and 1934,[3] and the only occasion on which a Socialist held the office of President of the Council was in 1928, when M. Rei formed a coalition of Socialists, Christian-Democrats, New Farmers, and the Labour party.

The most radical group in the Constituent Assembly had been that of the seven Socialist Revolutionaries, which, by the first *Riigikogu*, had split up into the **Independent Socialist party** and the **Communists** proper. In the 1926 elections no Independent Socialists were returned, but their more radical members, who had broken away

[1] M. Strandman was twice President of the Council (in 1919 and 1929); M. Pilp once (in 1920), and M. Kukk (1922). 643

[2] M. Tõnisson was three times President of the Council (in 1919, 1927, and 1933), and M. Jaakson once (1924).

[3] i.e. twice in 1919, and in 1924, 1928, 1931, and 1932.

7 [The Labour Party in Estonia -- Analyst]

to the institution of the office of President in principle. In August 578
1932 a Bill creating the office of President and reducing the number 642
of deputies to eighty, which had been adopted by the *Riigikogu* in March, was rejected in a referendum by 330,236 to 315,900 votes. A second and somewhat similar Bill, passed by the *Riigikogu* in February 1933, suffered an overwhelming defeat in a referendum held in the following June, about 67 per cent. of the votes cast being against it—the defeat of both projects being due as much to the opposition of the Socialists as to that of the Liberators.

The Government were therefore obliged to allow the Liberators to put their own proposals to the public vote; but, in the meantime, they extended the emergency law (a mild form of which had applied to certain districts ever since 1924) over the whole country, suppressed all extremist organizations of both the Right and the Left Wings, including the Liberators' League—which by now had cast its nets wide and was believed to have connexions with the Nazi party in Germany, and even augmented the quorum necessary for the acceptance of the Bill. In spite of these precautions the Liberators' project was approved, in the referendum held on October 14–16, 1933, by 416,000 votes to 157,000. Thereupon M. Tõnisson's Government resigned, and M. Paets formed a non-party Cabinet.

*The Dictatorship.* What was virtually a new Constitution thus 643 ●
came into force on January 24, 1934. To the new office of President of the State, for which elections were to be held every five years by direct and universal suffrage, were attached extremely wide powers, including the conduct of home and foreign policy, the appointment and dismissal of officials, and the initiation of legislation. The President was to appoint the Cabinet, and could dismiss it; he could adjourn the *Riigikogu*, which was now reduced to fifty members—or could dissolve it and hold new elections; he had the right of absolute or suspensive veto on all legislation, and in case of necessity could declare a state of emergency, and promulgate draft laws as decrees.

Pending the presidential elections, which were fixed for April, 642
M. Paets assumed the provisional presidency. The campaign for the 661
nomination of candidates was in full swing, and the chances of the Liberators' candidate, General Larka, appeared very favourable,[1] when, suddenly, on March 12, M. Paets proclaimed a state of emergency on the ground that the Liberators were planning a Nazi *putsch*. Martial law was declared for six months, and General Laidoner was appointed Commander-in-Chief. All party activities were forbidden, the Liberators' organizations were dissolved, and some 500 of their

[1] In January the Liberators had gained an overwhelming victory in the municipal elections; the results of these were annulled, however, after the *coup* of 1934.

Deputies and a National Council, the first being composed of 48 members elected by secret and universal suffrage on the basis of majority voting, and the second of 40 members—10 of whom are nominees of the President, and the remaining 30 representatives of the corporations, municipalities, and public institutions; the age qualification of voters is 22 years, of deputies 25 years, and of members of the National Council 40 years. The right to initiate legislation belongs to the Government with the President's cognizance, or to one-fifth of the Chamber of Deputies; measures relating to national defence, however, can only be proposed by the Government, while their consent is necessary for the introduction of fiscal measures by the Chamber of Deputies. Legislation rejected by the National Council requires for its option a three-fifths majority vote of the total number of deputies in the first Chamber. The President has the right of dissolution and suspensive veto, and the power to govern by decree between parliamentary sessions; he appoints and dismisses the Government, and, in the event of a vote of no confidence by the Chamber of Deputies, he may either dismiss the Government or order new elections; his acts must be countersigned by the Prime Minister and the competent Minister, and he may be impeached before the State Court; with the consent of the Chamber of Deputies he can submit any measure to a national referendum. Constitutional amendments may be proposed either by the President or by a majority of either of the two Chambers, and, in the event of the National Assembly's rejection of such a proposal made by the President, the latter may submit it to a referendum. Provision is made for legislation setting up autonomous professional corporations; freedom of conscience and religion are guaranteed, and there is no State Church; national minorities are permitted to establish autonomous institutions for cultural purposes and social assistance; instruction in their schools is to be conducted in their own language and in that of the State.

The Constitution came into force on January 1, 1938, and elections to the new Chamber of Deputies took place on February 24–5, when the Patriotic Front gained fifty-five out of the eighty seats. No other parties were permitted, but several of the former party leaders, including MM. Piip and Tõnisson, were returned. On April 24, 1938, M. Paets, by 219 votes to 19, was elected the first State President under the new Constitution.

### 3. Latvia

*Political Parties.* Five main groups are shown in the table below:[1] the Agrarians; the Right, Centre, and National Minority groups, one

[1] See Table 9 on next page.

or more of which were always to be found supporting the Agrarian Coalition Governments; and the Left Wing. The phenomenal number of parties in Latvia is accounted for in part by the fact that the Province of Latgale was equipped with a complete set of parties of its own, partly, too, by subdivision among the minority groups. 665

Here, even more than in Estonia, political life was dominated by the Agrarian parties, the most important of which were: the **Peasant Union**, which was founded in 1917, in nationalist and democratic opposition to the German-Balt landowners, and which represented the same class of well-to-do farmers, and stood for the same programme of land reform and agricultural protection, as did the Estonian Agrarian party; the **New Farmers**, led by M. Blodnieks, representing the new peasant-proprietor class; and the **Latgalian Christian Farmers**, led by Bishop Rancans and M. Kublinskis. The economic and political tenets of the three groups were practically identical; in foreign policy, however, the Peasant Union favoured, and the Latgalian Farmers opposed, closer relations with Poland, while in religious questions the Peasant Union was predominantly Lutheran, and the Latgalian Farmers purely Roman Catholic.

Although the combined parliamentary strength of the Agrarian *bloc* was, until 1931, considerably inferior to that of the Left, its actual preponderance is demonstrated by the fact that out of the eighteen Prime Ministers who held office between 1918 and 1934, thirteen were members of the Peasant Union, and one of the New Farmers' Party; while there were but two Governments—those of M. Zamuelis in 1924 and M. Skujenieks in 1926–8—in which no Agrarian party participated. Moreover, the Peasant Union has provided the majority of Latvia's prominent leaders: men like M. Ulmanis—eight times Prime Minister, and present Dictator and President of the State; M. Čakste, President of the State from 1922 until his death in 1927; M. Kviesis, President from 1930 to 1936; MM. Meierovics, Pauluks, Celmins, and Alberings, all former Prime Ministers; M. Klive and General Balodis. 665 643

Of the Centre groups, the most important was the **Democratic Centre party**, representing the professional and middle classes, led by M. Zemgals (President of the State from 1927 to 1930) and by MM. Zamuelis and Juraševskis (Prime Ministers in 1924 and 1928 respectively). In 1929 the Centre was reinforced by M. Skujenieks' Right Social-Democratic party, which moved over from the Left and took the name of the **Progressive Union**. M. Skujenieks had already held the office of Prime Minister from December 1926 to January 1928, and from May 1931 to February 1933 he headed a bourgeois-nationalist coalition notable for its attempts to curtail the rights of the national minorities. On the Right, the **Christian-** 665

Neumann and other leaders of the *Sovog*. This action called forth a German Note of protest, and the suspension of all local goods traffic across the frontier.[1]

In June Dr. Schreiber was dismissed on a charge of encouraging the Nazi movement, and was replaced at first by Dr. Reizgys, and later by M. Bruvelaitis, both of whom were Memellanders and appointed purely Lithuanian Directorates. The authorities now pursued the policy of reducing the Diet to impotence, firstly by disqualifying members of the Diet who belonged to 'seditious organisations',[2] and secondly by arranging that all the Lithuanian deputies should absent themselves, so that, on the rare occasions when the Diet met, a quorum was not present. In December the trial of 122 Nazis began in Kaunas, on charges of conspiracy for the reunion of Memel with Germany through armed revolt. Four prisoners were also accused of the murder of an official named Jesuttis, who was alleged to have betrayed Nazi plans to the Lithuanian authorities. Undeterred by indirect German pressure exerted through the reinforcement of troops on the frontier, or by representations made by the Guarantor Powers, the Court delivered heavy sentences in March 1935, including four death sentences on the murder charge.[3]

As a result of an appeal made by Herr Hitler during the visit of Sir John Simon and Mr. Eden to Berlin in March, a joint Note was addressed to Lithuania by Great Britain, France, and Italy on April 19, 1935,[4] urging an early meeting of the Diet, and the constitution of a Directorate possessing its confidence; the Lithuanian reply was unsatisfactory, but, in the meantime, M. Novakas had been succeeded as Governor by the more moderate M. Kurkauskas, and the German parties had been invited to collaborate in the reconstitution of the Directorate. Shortly after their refusal to do so, the three-year term of the Diet expired, on May 4, and new elections were not held until September. In the meantime the electoral law was amended in such a way as to deprive several candidates (including Dr. Schreiber) of the now united front of pro-German parties, known as the *Einheitsliste*,[5] of their electoral rights and Lithuanian citizen-

[1] Even the transit through Germany of goods destined for Lithuania was later prohibited.

[2] The non-Nazi, but German, *Landwirtschaftspartei* was now included in this category.

[3] These were later commuted to life imprisonment.

[4] In July 1934 the Powers had, in reply to a German Note complaining of the situation, adopted the line that complaints should be addressed to the League Council; and, although a committee of jurists appointed by the Council to consider two petitions presented by the Vice-President of the Diet in the following September had pronounced that infringements of the Statute had taken place, the matter had not been brought up for further discussion by the Council—owing, perhaps, to the pre-occupation of the Powers with the Saar Plebiscite.

[5] The *Einheitsliste* included all the German parties except the Social-Democrats, as well as a number of Lithuanians. It aimed ostensibly at the maintenance of the autonomous régime, but was supported by vigorous propaganda from the German Reich.